

# **Exhibit A**



**The Moscow & Monica apartments,** where a number of residents say they were scammed by the former property manager. TIM TAI / Staff Photographer

# Landlord again locks out tenants and then leaves

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The landlord of a North Philadelphia apartment complex has again locked dozens of tenants and their children out of their homes despite a judge's order that they be allowed to stay. Now, the state Attorney General's Office has filed a petition to find landlord Gagandeep Lakhmna in contempt of court.

Within an hour of a court hearing yesterday — in a case where more than two dozen tenants of the Moscow & Monica apartments say they were scammed by the complex's property manager — residents again lost access to the building and their units.

While some tenants used screwdrivers to reenter their homes, and others had to find a different place to sleep, building owner Lakhmna wasn't nearby. Lakhmna's Facebook stories posted Monday night show him sailing on a large yacht among crystal-blue waters and palm trees, which appear to be in the Caribbean.

"Every day it's a new series of events. It's appalling," said Jelani McMillan, who has lived at the complex since December with his 4-year-old daughter.

"My daughter has sickle cell, I need to get in to get her medicine," said McMillan, 35. "I am, like, nervous to leave the house. I shouldn't have to live like that."

The Office of the Pennsylvania Attorney General and Community Legal Services filed a petition late Tuesday asking a judge to find Lakhmna in contempt of court and immediately return tenants' access. The filing in Common Pleas Court also asks that Lakhmna be fined

\$10,000 for each day he is found in contempt.

"The repeated efforts and tactics by this landlord to evict tenants from their homes are cruel and in clear violation of the Landlord and Tenant Act," a spokesperson for Attorney General Josh Shapiro said in a statement. "He has now locked his tenants out of their apartments in the middle of a global health crisis against Judge Roberts' orders. ... No landlord should get away with illegally shutting off renters utilities and locking people out of their homes."

"Through no fault of their own, the tenants at this property were scammed by the landlord's former property manager and the landlord has compounded the harm to these tenants by repeatedly illegally locking them out and denying them access to their homes in violation of the Court's order," said Vik Patel, staff attorney at Community Legal Services, which is representing some of the tenants.

Lakhmna and his attorney Don Benedetto could not be reached for comment.

More than two dozen tenants were illegally locked out of their units earlier this month after Lakhmna discovered that his property manager, Frank Sanders, had allegedly been renting to some residents under the table and pocketing their money. Sanders allegedly made verbal leases with the tenants, which are legal leases for up to three years in Pennsylvania.

But Lakhmna and Benedetto say the residents are not legal tenants, and accused them of conspiring with Sanders. The new building manager began illegal locking tenants out and shutting off their power and util-

ities. Lakhmna filed a lawsuit to have all the tenants removed. Shapiro's office intervened in the case.

McMillan's power was cut off for three days at the beginning of March, he said, and some of his daughter's medication spoiled because of lack of refrigeration.

Common Pleas Court Judge Joshua Roberts is presiding over the case. A second hearing was held Monday, where two tenants and Lakhmna briefly testified. The case is set to continue April 16, and in the meantime, Roberts said, all tenants should be allowed to stay in their units as they have been since the first ruling March 15.

Instead, within an hour of the hearing, tenants lost access. There is only one entrance, which requires an electronic key fob, tenants said. Other entrances have been padlocked.

Chris Frank, who has lived at the complex with his fiancée since October, said he lost access Monday, then was one of a few who got it back Tuesday morning. He said tenants have been outside the complex calling the police for help, and trying to break into their units with screwdrivers.

McMillan said he and his daughter had to sleep at his girlfriend's Monday night. He said that he would have to force his way in Tuesday night.

"I am from an impoverished area with a lot of gun violence," said McMillan, his voice cracking. "I finally found a place of peace for my kid, and now I come here, and this place is worse than where I was living at."

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